UK COMPUTING RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 57ᵗʰ meeting of the UK Computing Research Executive Committee on Tuesday 29 June 2021 at 11:00, held online

PRESENT

#Jane Hillston (Chair)	Ann Blandford	David De Roure
#Chris Johnson	Kevin Jones	#Jie Xu

BY INVITATION

#Nadia Berthouze (Membership Panel Chair)	*James Dracott (EPSRC)	#Jessica Phillips (EPSRC)
#Edmund Robinson (CPHC)	Andrew Rylah (IET)	

IN ATTENDANCE

#Maxine Leslie (BCS)

APOLOGIES

David Hutchison	Bashar Nuseibeh	m.c. schraefel
Alastair Irons (BCS Academy)	Bill Mitchell (BCS alternate)	Ahmed Kotb (IET)

*attended part of the Exec meeting   #attended for joint meeting with CPHC

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting including Jess Phillips from EPSRC who had taken over from Rhys Perry. Apologies were received as above.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 9 March 2021 were APPROVED and are now ready for transfer to the UKCRC website. *[Action complete]*

3. MATTERS ARISING

UKCRCEC meeting held on 9 March 2021

Matters arising 9 March 2021, item 4: Chairs report Consultations with govt depts – the Chair reported back on the action to form a small group to consider consultations by topic, as she had received an email from D Hutchison to say that Chris Hankin (Imperial) has agreed to join the group and also that he has been in touch with Anthony Finkelstein, who will be willing to join after he's left his government post. The plan is therefore to commence work on this in the autumn.

Matters arising 9 March 2021, item 4: Chairs report Directory of expertise – the Chair had considered sending the email out to members again but it is not clear that this would help. A Blandford indicated that this is part of the website work that she and A Rylah had been undertaking and the hope is that once this is up and running on the website for people to see, it will be a starting point for a useful response.

A Rylah further reported that some re-organisation is underway on the areas of expertise and the ACM mapping, to include headings and sub categories with a search capacity by subject. The Chair proposed waiting until this work is complete before encouraging Members to

contribute their areas of expertise again. All new members are asked to reply on this and the response rate is very good.

For the other pages, A Rylah reported that the inconsistencies were being addressed, such as the appearance of two sets of FAQs (which will also be updated). Other areas of content are planned such as interviews with Executive Committee Members so that more visitors can be attracted to viewing UKCRC webpages, but this is phase 2. It would be good to consider how UKCRC can be marketed eg, via social media or blogs, so that the content is not static but a gateway for the community and for government/industry looking for experts too.

A Rylah indicated that the timescale will be in the coming weeks, depending on the IET web team priorities and that he will be moving to another role within the IET. The new contact(s) will be fully briefed on UKCRC general/website activities.

Item 4: Chairs report Obituaries and the new webpage – this action is still on-going as there are higher priorities such as expertise listings; however, it was agreed that the historical obituaries should not be restored. Action should be assigned to the new IET contact and M Leslie.

UKCRCEC meeting held on 9 March 2021
Item 4: Chairs report RS Sectional Committee nominations – K Jones reported that he has been in contact with the new Chair Andrew Blake and previous Chair Steve Furber, who indicated that the timescales require that nominations be put forward before the summer each year. As we have missed the boat for 2021, it was agreed that we should include this as a standing item for action early each year. M Leslie undertook to write this into the process and liaise with K Jones to action.   **ACTION: M Leslie/K Jones**

4.   **CHAIR'S REPORT**

Members received and noted the report.

University of Leicester: In relation to the job situation at Leicester, at the last meeting E Robinson had received a response to the CPHC Committee letter, but UKCRC Exec had not received a response, but received one the next day. The VC had thanked UKCRC Exec but didn't commit to a change of mind. However the outcome for Informatics was not as bad as had been feared, although for the maths department this was not the case as the research topics here are not as aligned with the university topics.

E Robinson noted that there is an ongoing situation at Leicester with strike action and that CPHC Committee is certainly willing to feedback to university leaders if this happens again. In the end the cost savings were not significant but the reputational damage and effect on staff morale were. Both UKCRC and CPHC Execs felt that they had an influence.

EPSRC Doctoral Education workshop: this had included supporting mature students and different socio-economic groups coming in. There had been diverse opinions for example from chemists and electronic engineers, for which the models of education are different. There is strong consensus that it is important that students get opportunities for enriching experiences. For some disciplines there are opportunities to take a break in PhDs to get other experiences and it is thought to be good to give these opportunities to PhD students if they are going into industry rather than research.

Society of Research Software Engineers (SRSE): At the EPSRC workshop on Doctoral Education, the Chair had met the current President of the SRSE, Paul Richmond. After the meeting Paul asked to meet with the Chair to explore areas of common interest between SRSE and UKCRC including how the two organisations might work together to try to establish both the careers of research software engineers and the role of software underpinning

research on a more sound footing with EPSRC/UKRI. The Chair had recommended that Paul have a chat with D De Roure given his role in the Software Sustainability Institute, which would be another useful ally in any such effort. D De Roure reported that he had met with Paul Richmond. There were many groups involved around the country and many models and it included independent research organisations such as the College of Music. In terms of what is relevant to UKCRC, it would be good to raise awareness and the interactions are good.

In terms of future actions, the Chair suggested a meeting between herself, Paul Richmond, D De Roure might help to keep the dialogue going. J Phillips noted that one of her colleagues is having discussions with RSE fellows which she could help to introduce.

C Johnson noted (via the chat) that QUB has a large number of research software engineers on specialist contracts, separate from the rest of the Uni career progression. Maire O'Neill is a good contact for this. See also
https://www.qub.ac.uk/ecit/Aboutus/ECITEngagementCall/AdditionalInformation

A Blandford noted (via the chat) that the UCL equivalent in RSE is Jonathan Cooper
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/research-it-services/people/jonathan-cooper

The Chair is interested in thinking of those with different careers, on less advantageous contracts on the same career progression ladder, but not recognised as having an academic post. D De Roure undertook to take action forward on this as appropriate.

ACTION: D De Roure

Position of Chair: J Hillston announced that she intends to stand down as UKCRC Chair at the next meeting, although will stay on the Executive Committee for the one year remaining of her term of office and can therefore assist the new Chair during transition, as A Blandford has helped her. Members of the Exec were invited to consider stepping into the role.

ACTION: Members

5. CONSULTATIONS & SUBMISSIONS

Members received and noted the report. C Johnson reported that there is a lot of flux at the moment with the establishment of ARIA, of which the details are not yet public. There has been a dip in engagement by UKCRC during the pandemic, but the target is to make one response to calls per month. There is currently a proliferation of calls for consultation and therefore a greater need than ever to work in this space and unfortunately little engagement from members.

The Chair asked, in view of the enthusiasm expressed by Members at the January joint CPHC workshop, whether we should repeat the workshop in order to encourage Members to get involved. C Johnson replied that this would be good as it is likely that the requirement to feed back into government is likely to increase. It may be that some Members are engaging via their own institutions instead.

E Robinson indicated that he is happy for CPHC to do what it can to support and it was agreed that a workshop should be run in late October/November, either F2F or online and invite Anthony Finkelstein at the end, which worked really well last time. One possibility is to hold a F2F workshop in Westminster in collaboration with a government department and C Johnson, E Robinson and Chair undertook to liaise on this.

ACTION: C Johnson/Chair/E Robinson

6. RESEARCH FUNDING AND POLICY

6.1 EPSRC Update

Members received and noted the report. J Phillips noted that the major item to flag is the budget. The EPSRC budget is known but not the ICT theme allocation as yet.

In addition, EPSRC is currently recruiting to the Strategic Advisory Teams to fill the four available ICT theme vacancies: Digital Twins, Verification & Correctness and Software Engineering, Autonomous Systems and Quantum Technology in ICT. Members were asked to circulate this to anyone who might be interested in applying.

E Robinson thanked J Phillips and J Dracott for preparing these reports, which are circulated to the wider CPHC/UKCRC memberships as this really helps those that are less connected to EPSRC. J Phillips was asked what is coming out of the government headline research spending and replied that it is not clear what will happen after the comprehensive spending review. It is hoped that there will be long term settlements next time, but it remains important to lobby and influence as much as institutions can. There is no starting pistol on the SR yet, but J Phillips will let J Dracott know that both UKCRC and CPHC are willing to help in providing evidence at the appropriate time.

J Phillips indicated that she was happy for the report to be circulated to the full UKCRC membership subsequent to the meeting. *[action complete]*

When J Dracott joined during the Membership Panel report, he reported that for the SR, there is interest across government about what computing, AI, future internet and standards protocol, quantum etc will look like. It is likely that only a fraction will go ahead into 4 bids and this will be picked up with SATs shortly. There are continuing conversations (including with DCMS) about opportunities in the research workspace for the UK, but uncertainties still about regional funding. There is high value of high tech hubs around the UK and how these can underpin, especially for SMEs. There are likely to be short turnaround requests to the community, with opportunities for lots of work but maybe not all will be taken on board.

E Robinson reiterated his offer of help and to be informed if anything changes. J Dracott replied that there are lots of variables. It is about making the case, but we need as much evidence of where the value is for the UK (sovereign capability and the importance of safeguarding specific technologies within that). An example is chip shortages and how this can be addressed using home- based talent in research in this area, without relying on others.

A Blandford raised the issue of ODA cuts mentioned by J Dracott, particularly in terms of the funds being committed then withdrawn. This has been incredibly negative and not just to the research community. Is there anything to be done to limit the damage?

J Dracott replied that there is a changed perception of risk, to minimise the effect of that happening again and lots of conversations on mitigation. The reduction to ODA is temporary, so hopefully we will be able to restart collaborations. This is not non-trivial as reputational damage has already been done.

C Johnson noted that QUB has used NI plus internal funds to continue projects. The Chair observed that how the funding is channelled makes a difference to us. If it is through UKRI then we have input, but we have less influence with other channels such as DCMS. J Dracott noted that the question is always about Haldane, particularly as ARIA gets up and running.

7. REPORTS

7.1 Membership Panel

Members received and noted the report. N Berthouze reported that the two new elected members (Julie McCann and Faron Moller) means that the review group is back to a good size. The Panel has supported two new applications.

The revised list of membership criteria is not yet listed on the website. The revisions take into account applications from industry by removing the emphasis on the typical academic type of leadership (such as conferences). The list of criteria has also been re-ordered, removing the reference to fellowship and adding upholding of standards. The intention is to keep the list live and refine as more applications from industry are received. N Berthouze invited feedback from Members.

K Jones noted that on the industry criteria, point 1 is good to bring in, but there is a degree of danger that we are not recognising the difference between CTOs of big and of small companies. This therefore needs interpretation. (Also, noted some typos).

J Hillston flagged that D Hutchison is waiting to hear about the criteria before making nominations and N Berthouze undertook to feed this back to D Hutchison so that the number of applications can be expanded.   **ACTION: N Berthouze**

A Blandford indicated that it is not necessarily about an individual, but about the portfolio or combination eg, start ups from non-related areas that have tech with a strong track record across more than one of these areas.

The Chair flagged that para 9, evidence of upholding BCS/IET standards, conducting oneself professionally and fairly at all times is a "must" rather than a "may".

N Berthouze undertook to highlight this, make amendments as suggested and send the find copy to M Leslie for arranging upload to the website.
                                                              ACTION: N Berthouze/M Leslie

JD joined the meeting at this point (see EPSRC report above)

7.2 Open Publishing Working Group – Members noted that this group had not met in some time, so it was agreed that this will be removed from future agendas as the activity is dormant.

7.3 International Matters

Informatics Europe (IE) – J Xu reported that he had attended an IE meeting two months ago where there was a general discussion on collecting evidence about education and informatics across European countries. Content is being built for the website and this is now at an intermediate stage. The biggest challenge is that different countries have different education systems, between countries in continental Europe as well as between nations in the UK. There will be another meeting in October and J Xu undertook to report back then on progress.

The Chair noted that the IE European Computer Science Summit (annual conference) is due to be held in October. This is usually an interesting event combining technology and policy/strategy talks and workshops. In the past there have been workshops on women in computing and new academic leaders.

International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) – there was no written report and A Irons had sent his apologies.

7.4 CPHC – see [Item 10: Collaborative Working](#)

7.5 BCS Academy – no report.

7.6 IET report – see [Item 3 Matters Arising: directory of expertise](#) above.

8. UKCRCEC 2022 MEETING DATES & FORMAT

Members RECEIVED and NOTED the 2022 meeting dates. It had been agreed at the June 2020 meeting that the meeting format would be reviewed at the June 2021 meeting. Although the online format has been much more successful than anticipated, it was the general view that hybrid F2F/online meetings did not work well and that occasional F2F meetings helped with group cohesion. After some discussion, it was agreed that the 2022 meetings would be held online with the exception of one F2F meeting, potentially the joint meeting with CPHC, currently scheduled for October 2022.

The October 2021 meeting was originally scheduled to take place at IET offices, London; however this is in half term, so it was agreed that the date and venue of this meeting will be decided once the situation with the pandemic is clearer. The AGM will remain an online meeting in December.   **ACTION: M Leslie/Chair**

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

For the current Executive Committee elections, the Chair reported that we have received two nominations for the four vacancies and urged Exec Members to approach relevant contacts in the community to persuade them to nominate themselves or others. It would be good to have at least five nominations, so that an election can be held.   **ACTION: Members**

A Blandford proposed a vote of thanks to J Hillston for chairing UKCRC for the last three years.

The Chair thanked attendees and closed the Executive Committee meeting.

10. UKCRC-CPHC COLLABORATIVE WORKING
(CPHC Committee members in attendance: Edmund Robinson (Chair), Rob Aspin, Steven Bradley, James Davenport, Ray Farmer, Sally Fincher, Nick Savage, Mark Griffiths, Iain Phillips)

E Robinson opened the meeting by talking about previous, current and future collaboration on running workshops and communications (such as the letters to the University of Leicester over redundancies), helping to serve the same sorts of communities in a coordinated way and with a similar voice. Also, tying in with the BCS Academy of Computing through Alastair Irons and I Phillips. Each Chair outlined current priorities.

UKCRC priorities – J Hillston reported that she will be stepping down as Chair in October 2021, leaving the agenda open for whoever takes over. There is an ongoing mission to get UKCRC Members to be more active and engaged. Part of this is to answer the question 'what is UKCRC for and what does it do?'. The joint workshop in January, organised by S Fincher and C Johnson aimed to inform the community on why it is important to get involved in consultation work. The workshop was very enthusiastically received and well attended (over 80 sign ups and over 60 attendees). However, in spite of being an interesting and useful workshop, it has not resulted in Members stepping forward to assist C Johnson with responses. The plan is to run the workshop again in October/November.

In addition, UKCRC is setting up a small working group and is talking to Anthony Finkelstein to see how UKCRC can promote services into the CSA network and work more proactively

with government rather than reactively responding to consultations. The working group will start its work in the autumn too, when Anthony steps down as National Security CSA, so there will be no conflict of interest.

UKCRC is also talking to the Society of Research Software Engineers (SRSE) to explore how UKCRC and SRSE might work together to try to establish both the careers of research software engineers and the role of software underpinning research on a more sound footing with EPSRC/UKRI. There are also conversations with Informatics Europe.

CPHC priorities – E Robinson explained that the CPHC Committee sees itself as an advocate on behalf of the community and would like to do more in this area. There are various areas of community support including running community building workshops and m.c. schraefel's workshops to support the increase of women in CS departments.

The programme of mentoring workshops 'A Chair in 10 Years' is continuing to be run by N Savage. S Fincher has run a whole series of projects on various aspects of CS education and there is scope for more of these. There will be a further round of the series of workshops for HODs/DoRs/DoTs to help build the community.

CPHC has been liaising with the BCS Academy and with the Institute of Coding. A number of Committee Members are involved in the IoC so there is good insight into the academic departments developing teaching programmes. The aim is to spread outside of IoC projects, into the broader community over the next 12-18 months. Overall the aim is become more visible, better publicised and more useful for the community. One of CPHC's assets is the mailing list which includes a lot of members in senior positions in CS departments around the country and this is a good way to distribute information such as EPSRC/UKRI updates. There is also access to HODs of CS Departments.

Ethics – there have been previous discussions on a joint workshop in this area. C Johnson mentioned (via the chat) that the MoD and DSTL had been working on the ethical aspects of ML as an area of key national importance going forward. J Davenport is involved in an AI Masters project and noted that the challenge is that because the subject is relatively new there is no consensus on what works best. He is chairing an IoC work package to produce some resources and one question being considered is whether ethics should be taken as a stand-alone or embedded subject. They are still awaiting the website launch followed by public resources including public lectures. Members discussed whether it makes sense to both embed ethics and make it a stand-alone topic and the pros and cons of these options. One concern is that too many institutions tick the ethics box if it is included in the final year project. The CPHC Chair queried whether we should be doing a joint serious package of work in this area.

UKCRC membership – E Robinson welcomed the intent to broaden the UKCRC membership and asked if there is anything that CPHC can do to help with this. J Hillston explained that a year ago, the Exec decided to react to the change in the landscape which sees cutting edge research much closer between industry and academia. In order to foster more dialogue on shared concerns, it will be useful to increase the industrial membership to include those that have influence on research in industry. Industrial members may also have the ear of different government departments. N Berthouze indicated that the membership criteria have been reviewed to include this dimension. The application process is very straight forward, either self-nomination or nomination of others and she would welcome CPHC's help in securing more applications from industry. J Hillston indicated that there are two types of people: those in industry that *do* research and research leaders that may have originally worked at an HE institution. Alternatively those that commission research or have an interest in how research is conducted without conducting it themselves. This type of member is valuable as they have shown leadership in way in which research is conducted.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2021 *(11:00-13:00)*
Tuesday 26 October – IET Offices, London (venue/date TBC)

AGM
Friday 3 December 2021 *(14:00-15:00)* – Online

COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2022 *(11:00-13:00)*
Tuesday 8 March – Online
Tuesday 7 June – Online
*Tuesday 25 October – BCS Offices, London

AGM
Friday 2 December *(14:00-15:00*) – Online

*to be co-located with CPHC Committee meeting if possible
NB: F2F/online format TBC; BCS and IET rooms subject to availability on these dates